

Mitch Randall - Countering Conversion

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SPEAKERS

Tanner Randall, Mitch Randall

Tanner Randall 00:03

We acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, Fire Keepers of the Haudenosaunee the Indigenous peoples on whose land Syracuse University now stand. May the information you glean from this podcast motivate you to uphold indigenous values protect Mother Earth and honor indigenous treaties in the face of white supremacy in the Doctrine of Discovery, what do we take away when we learn about it? We take away this veil of darkness around these conquering practices. How do we look forward and promise a better life? Welcome to the doctrine of Christian discovery. I'm Tanner Randall, your host from good faith media. We're producing this podcast at the religious origins of white supremacy conference in December of 2023, at Syracuse University in New York. This year is particularly special because it's the 100th anniversary of Johnson V. Macintosh, the supreme court proceeding that installed the framework of the doctrine of discovery within American government. We will be talking about the different ramifications of the doctrine of discovery and how it led to indigenous values and land being stolen as well as white supremacy and the general idea of revitalized indigenous culture. This week, we've attempted to pull the curtains back on the doctrine of Christian discovery. At the religious origins of white supremacy conference at Syracuse University, we discuss white nationalism, how the Doctrine of Discovery inflates Christian nationalism, and what happens internationally when evil powers take hold and try to affect indigenous rights. I'll take with me after this conference, the lasting messages passed on by our guests, and stories of resilience. But what I'll do in my own actions after this conference, I'll pay more attention to all the facts of the doctrine of discovery, question everything and make sure to look at the international problems as well as our own. Because of the tide rises, all ships float higher. We would like to thank our sponsors who made this podcast possible. Many thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University, indigenous values initiative, American Indian law Alliance, American Indian community house, good faith media tenets era and towards our common public life. We appreciate your support. I'm Tanner Randall with good faith media. Our guest on today's episode is the CEO of good faith media, Dr. Mitch Randall. Dr. Randall is an enrolled citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation. And he's also my dad. For better or worse, you can make the judgments on his parenting throughout this podcast. Hi, I'm here with Dr. Mitch Randall, the CEO of one of our sponsors, good faith media. Mitch, how are you doing? Well,

Mitch Randall 03:33

it's good to be here.

Tanner Randall 03:33

So this weekend, we've been at the Doctrine of Discovery conference in Syracuse, New York. And it's been giving a lot of helpful information. But I think that we've heard a lot of extremely daunting and historical problems that are happening around the world. And we've learned a lot about those issues. What are you kind of taking away from the analysis of this weekend of a lot of the issues we're facing today? Or because of a document written 600 years ago? How do you kind of conceptualize that? Well, it's

Mitch Randall 04:08

quite daunting to be frank with you. Before I kind of launch into that, I do want to thank Adam, Brett and Phil Arnold, who invited good faith media to be at this conference and to help produce this podcast, the doctrine of Christian discovery. It has been a remarkable experience and really appreciate the staff here at Syracuse, as well as everybody involved in the conference to help us put on this, this podcast, so just want to give them a thank you before we begin. But going back to your question, I said it was daunting, and I think it really is because as we have heard in a lot of the interviews that you have conducted over the weekend, it is hard to fathom that a document written 500 years ago, still has as much influence as it does in our call Church and Society, it is so engrained in the framework of our Constitution, our justice system, our social fabric, that we don't even recognize it at times. But then all of a sudden, someone lifts the veil from your face. And you begin to see the Doctrine of Discovery everywhere, and how much influence it, it has actually had, not only here in the United States, but globally. So my first reaction, it's just really daunting and overwhelming to think this one document, written over 500 years ago, has had so much influence over our culture.

Tanner Randall 05:47

And while we heard these stories, I found myself thinking about what other documents are even close to that influence, right. And I think that you can look at collections of stories that may have had similar influence, like the Bible, or the Quran, or documents of that nature. But I think the only thing that even comes close to it would be like the Magna Carta, or something like that, that is shown us through the Enlightenment period. But even in that case, those serve for some kind of productive purpose, at least in common nomenclature, they're thought of as positive documents, the Doctrine of Discovery seems to lurk in the darkness. And like you said, we're taking off that veil, that shadow that surrounds it, and trying to bring it out to light. And it can definitely be an overstimulating realization. But we did hear a lot of really interesting efforts and important efforts from some of our guests about how to combat some of these historical issues. So I kind of want to ask you a question. Because, of course, the purpose of conferences to learn something new, it's not a shame, to not have any knowledge of a problem, you always have to learn it somewhere. So I'm just kind of curious, what's something that you did not kind of know, coming into this weekend or was presented in a different way that you've not thought about it before. During this conference? Well,

Mitch Randall 07:14

a lot of the discussion surrounding case law I was unfamiliar with, and this conference centers, of course, on Johnson V. McIntosh. So I mean, from that one piece of legislation, what I, you know, really was reinforced to me about that case was how little representation indigenous people have had in the legal system, and how our judicial system is heavily skewed to this concept of doctrine of discovery. And that, because the federal government claims ownership, that the indigenous people who were here before, you know, the colonists have no rights to the land that they actually possessed. They're treated as simply a conquered people that has resonated the entire weekend.

Tanner Randall 08:08

Now, I think, certainly the part of Johnson V McIntosh that is non native centered at all is quite striking, like the subject matter does involve indigenous lands, but there's not a single indigenous person in the room to present their opinion. Right, exactly. Which is really odd, because you and I come from the Macintosh family of Muskogee creeks. And so when I first heard about the case, I was like, oh, MC intelligence is the name, which my own personal biases, but kind of learning and being brought to light on that idea was pretty profound. I

Mitch Randall 08:45

think. And then also, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. But another thing that I learned, and it really was reinforced, even though I had kind of a basic understanding of it, is how influential the Doctrine of Discovery has been utilized globally. And we talked to Professor Miller early on, and he talked about how doctrine discovery was used in the colonization of Africa. And then we talked to Chavez and others about how it's been utilized in Brazil. You know, this really, not only is you it's not unique to the United States, we have unique problems in the United States with our indigenous cultures. But this is a global problem, and how the Doctrine of Discovery has been codified and utilized for simple land grabbing across the world and the oppression of indigenous peoples.

Tanner Randall 09:36

I definitely think there are three major areas of study that I'm going to look into following this conference. We spoke to Eve Reyes-Aguirre About femicide on the southern border. Yeah. And that's something I'm going to go research because you I something that is just starting to come to light is the missing and murdered indigenous women cases across the country specifically in In the northern states and Canada, but often when you have that added notion of migrants or people that may not have US citizenship, the popular culture tends not to pay attention. Because for whatever reason, they don't deem it as important if they're not a part of, quote, unquote, our team. So I think that's something I'm going to research after this conference, just because it's extremely important to bring light to issue, particularly your surrounding, surrounding women and women who are in situations where they can be susceptible to danger. And so that's one thing, and then also the religious racism that we heard about. Yeah, so that's something I didn't know about. And then I think the last thing that I want to leave off with is the 10 aspects of the Doctrine of Discovery found within Johnson V. McIntosh, that Dr. Miller talked about. And I think that, you know, being able to take those principles and apply them to other nations from an indigenous perspective, looking at those communities and not the actions of the oppressor or saying that, you know, this is the system the English uses the system that the Spanish used, or the Portuguese, but looking into these isolated communities and saying, This is what happened in this community by this person, making them seem more of a destroyer of communities, and not a builder of

empires. So I'm kind of curious as to, you know, I know that you were commenting on femicide, when we first started talking about it, or religious racism, I know those are concepts that are rather new to us. Tell me about what you thought when you first heard about this problems, and especially the personal stories that we bear witness to?

Mitch Randall 11:57

Yeah, I mean, they're absolutely heart wrenching, and heart wrenching, but also infuriating, that that still takes place today, in the 21st century. A lot of times when we study indigenous issues and cultures, we often get lost in the history of these issues, because it's so problematic when we talk about the Doctrine of Discovery written 500 years ago, and its implementation in places like Africa, South America, and here in the United States. And so it's, we often get lost in that historic, historical narrative. But we mustn't forget that the ramifications of the doctrine of Christian discovery are still prevalent today. And let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. A lot of times, we are asked, why do these issues still matter today, because Doctrine of Discovery, as we've already alluded to was written over 500 years ago to you know, slavery is something of the past. You know, racism is something of the past oppression. You know, we feel like we live in this utopia, but we do not. For example, when I think about the Native American boarding schools and Canada and the United States, I think about the children who are currently being separated from their families at the border, the US Mexico border, we have been here before, we have seen the federal government, separate families, indigenous families, were subjected to that. In World War Two, we saw that with the internment camps of Japanese citizens in the United States. And we're seeing again, today, we have a history of separating families. Why? Because the doctrine of Christian discovery teaches that this white culture is superior to all others, and therefore we know better than any other culture around the world. You mentioned missing and murdered indigenous women that still is taking place today. There's an incredible movie out right now over that is a portrayal of the book by David Grann, called Killers of the Flower Moon Martin Scorsese, has done a brilliant job putting that movie together a lot of criticism on the movie. But the basic story is simple. And that is there was a time in eastern Oklahoma, where oil magnets orchestrated the murder of Indigenous women and men to gain their land rights. They could make more money in pursuing oil for their companies. We think that stories of the past but it's happening today, you look at human trafficking, trafficking around this country, and especially in North America, from Central America. It is at an all time high. Our women are endangered, especially women of color from indigenous communities. And so these issues are still alive and well today and they're being fueled by this attitude and I in concept of it doctrine of Christian discovery, and we have to get away from it. And so, you know, when I hear the personal stories in the interviews that we were so fortunate to listen to this weekend. Again, I'm heartbroken, I'm infuriated. But dinner, I'm also inspired. I'm inspired to leave here and do more, to stand up and speak out, regarding the doctrine of Christian discovery, and to try to fight for a more equitable and just world for all people.

Tanner Randall 15:31

That is quite powerful. And I do agree that you know, the stories of resilience, and people fighting against it do provide hope. But the problem is daunting. And I think that there's a lot of hesitation towards talking about a document written over 600 years ago. But at the end of the day, if you don't find the Doctrine of Discovery being placed, and perverting US law disturbing, you should really consider why we have a country's built on the separation of church and state. And there's a reason that we do

that. It's because it should be a choice for what you want to practice in your religion. And it infuriates me that so many people are very willing to talk about how they were called to a religion, but don't give other people the opportunity to be called to their religion. Because that's such an intimate moment. And we talked a lot about spirituality and religion. And I think that, you know, making that distinction is an important step towards getting rid of the doctrine of discovery, because spirituality manifests in so many different ways. And when your spirituality does show itself, that's when you find your religion, you find how you practice. And so that's a lot of the issues with white evangelicalism, like we've talked about is it forces that religion on you without having any kind of spiritual aspect. And then some most times your, your spirituality is beaten, and cut, scraped, and diminished until it fits into this cookie cutter shape that was never meant for you. And so some of those stories are quite heartbreaking. And that's why we're talking about this document, is because it is a perversion of US law. And the fact that it's within our court system should make people angry. But if it doesn't, you need to figure out why. Right. And so I want to talk about now, kind of our, our lasting messages coming out of this conference. Because I think for me it's quite startling that the Doctrine of Discovery is not like realized within US law. And that's something I've always kind of come to terms with being somebody who studied a lot in indigenous law. But I also realized this week that our academics in the United States is so American centric, it is. And so talking to the people with international problems puts me in a headspace to where I'm going to go explore at danger indigenous peoples across the world. And I did this a little bit in college. I know. Professor Miller mentioned the Sami people in the Nordic States and Russia, and how they are fighting for its place at the table and a right to cross borders because of their cultural practices. I know that the Udege people of Russia, have had long standing problems with the Russian government encroaching on their land, trying to take out the last Tiger sanctuary in Russia. And even though they have historical roots, and are one of the oldest indigenous peoples in the world, the only reason Putin decided to not take their land is because he liked the Tigers. And it's just those stories are so prevalent. And sometimes we need to step out of this US centric, voting or US centric political idea. Because as much as we do have problems, I had a professor in college who would tell us, Native American people in the united states do have issues that we need to solve. But at the end of the day, this is the best situation for indigenous people in the world. And we should take advantage of that take advantage of our ability to now more so than ever to express our sovereign right to govern and our sovereign right to reclaim in what that means is doing that within our nation. and internationally. So what are your lasting? That is my lasting idea I'm going to take away from this conference. I'm curious on what you're thinking.

Mitch Randall 20:09

You know, I spoke to one of the panels during the conference, and this question was posed to me in another vein, but I told the individual who asked the question, one of the things that I am committing the rest of my life to, is countering the idea of conversion to conquest. I am a person of faith, in particular practice my faith within the Christian tradition, even though I have a lot of problems with the term Christianity anymore. I consider myself a Jesus follower, because a majority of evangelical Christians these days really don't want to have anything to do with Jesus, because he's problematic for them. Because He talks so much about inclusion, love and justice. They talk about other parts of the Bible, but they certainly don't talk about Jesus. So with that said, I'm attempting to counter the whole idea of conversion leading to conquest. Because if you think about the idea of Christian conversion, 500 years ago, when the doctrine discovery was established, even to today, if you were to follow that type of logic, conversion to conquest leads to dominance, a dominant culture above all else. And that's why you have

the explorers and the colonists and the slavers throughout the last 500 years of our existence, based upon a Christian belief, because it was all about conversion to Christianity, conquest of culture, in order to dominate, which means to take land, to take resources, and to live above all else. Therefore, I have taken away from this weekend, and renewed inspiration of fighting that good fight, and attempt to call out this doctrine that has been so devastating to indigenous cultures from around the world. I contend Tanner that the Gospels in particular, Jesus, even more specifically, would denounce this idea of conversion. You read the Gospels, Jesus never talks about being converted. All he says is he offers an invitation to come follow him to learn how to live a spiritual and ethical life. Guess what, you don't have to abandon your culture, you don't have to abandon your identity, to follow Jesus. And that's one of the things that I think resonate could resonate globally around the world, to say, You know what, we all want to live an ethical life. You can be a Muslim, you can be a Buddhist, you can be a Christian, but you don't have to abandon your personhood, your identity, your culture, because that makes you who you are. And so I leave this conference with a renewed spirit of trying to fight what my dear colleague up in the Pacific Northwest Christian spiritualist, Lenore Three Stars, is advocating for a theology of wholeness, to meet individuals where they are, to respect their personhood and to say, I see you, I hear you, I recognize and understand and hear the problems you're facing. So let me help you in your journey to become whole. Not that I have the answers not that I have the formula or solutions, but I want to relate to you so that we can be better humans together in this world. And to me, that is the idea of indigenous existence, the recognition of the symbiotic relationship we have with each other and within the world.

Tanner Randall 24:02

This symbiotic relationship that we've talked so much about this weekend is something that is going to ring true for a long time for me, being able to be in balance, knowing that the Haudenosaunee are the reason we have a lot of the equitable systems and our government. And that's also a story that we learned this weekend that needs to be taught more. But we need to really pay attention to these indigenous principles because you just pointed out that we can learn a lot about spirituality, the teachings of Jesus or any other religion, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, from indigenous ways of life and understanding that we can be in a symbiotic relationship being productive by as individuals and to identify, you know, those places that may need more some symbiotic dynamics. There was a quote from Steven Newcomb in his keynote speech this weekend of talking about the colonizers name one place that is that are better off for they touched it. And I can't think of very many, I can't think at all their moments of charity and moments of human interaction that may ring true to who we're trying to be. But there's nothing that can bring back what we were. So we're going to work towards reclaiming a lot of these indigenous values. And I think it'd be productive to take those with us in our life. And I would like to thank the religious origins of white supremacy conference this week for having us at Syracuse University, and this thing happens every year. So keep an eye out and definitely try to attend if you can, because we had an absolute ball. I've really enjoyed putting this podcast together with us specifically to enter all of our sponsors.

Mitch Randall 26:02

Thank you. All of the staff here at Syracuse University have been great, but I have to admit as a dad, I just really enjoyed hanging out with you.

Tanner Randall 26:09

It was alright for me. All right, signing off. Thanks for listening to this episode of the doctrine of Christian discovery recorded at the 2023 Religious Origins of White Supremacy Conference at Syracuse University in New York. This podcast is produced in collaboration between Good Faith Media, Syracuse University and the Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm Tanner Randall for Good Faith Media. Our executive producers are Mitch Randall of Good Faith Media Philip P. Arnold and Sandy Bigtree of the Indigenous values initiative and Adam DJ Brett Syracuse University and the American Indian law Alliance. Our producer is Cliff Vaughn, and our editor is David Pang. Our music comes from Pond5. Production assistance provided by the American Indian Law Alliance. To learn more, go to doctrineofdiscovery.org.